Gilbert Cannan's Nineteenth Appearance

By N. P. D.

OPINION varies regarding the needs of the theatrical world. A modest man, to whom a knee is a joint and nothing more, will warmly commend the demand of the chorus for shoes and stockings. A sentimental manager, on the other hand, such as Mr. Belasco, will say that what is needed in the theatre is loving kindness and this opinion, it is interesting to note, is echoed in Gilbert Cannan's new story of the stage called *Mummery*. At a public dinner given to Mr. Cannan's artistic genius, in order to promote his ideal theatre, in response to the many pleasant things that have been said about him and his proposed new temple of art, he arises and, beaming boyishly, as we read, startled his audience with the following brief speech:

"I'm so happy to be back. Thank you very much. The theatre needs love. I give you my love."

The remedy sounds simple and is specific and can be recommended for its cheapness if nothing more. But other things in the scheme of this genius in artistic designing are not so cheap. One item in the budget for his theatre, which seems to be a combined superior German and outdoor Greek model, is $125 for "food for the birds and fishes." as Mr. Cannan says, however, a specially benign deity must watch over idealists, as drunkards and children, since a great disaster filled the news columns of the papers next day, crowding out Charles Mann's extraordinary speech, and the budget for his theatre, including the item, more startling than even shoes and stockings, of $125 for "food for the birds and fishes."

II.

Mr. Cannan's novel is the story of another artistic genius, another "Charles" in fact, such as W. Somerset Maugham's in *The Moon and Sixpence*. But all comparison rests here. Mr. Maugham camouflages his genius so successfully that his readers are ready to believe in him. Charles Mann in *Mummery* is a familiar and easily recognized type. More accurately, *Mummery* is the story of two geniuses and a woman, one genius who is going to revolutionize the theatre by his designs, and the other by his plays. In more than either of his men, however, Mr. Cannan is interested in his lady, "Clara," who early gracefully glides into the spotlight and stays there. Yet it is difficult to know just what Mr. Cannan is trying to make out of Clara. Perhaps it is the name alone that recalls another Clara, the famous Miss Middleton, although there may also be something Meredithian in her charm and independence. As soon as Clara and Charles Mann arrive together in London from France she says:

"Carlo, dear, I shall have to marry you."

He spun round as though he had been stung and asked, "Good God, why?"

Charles does not like the idea of being "pinned down" as he already knows from experience—although Clara unluckily knows nothing of this experience. From the beginning of the story we seem to see in Clara the embodiment of what Mr. Cannan calls the new spirit stirring in humanity, of freedom, and it is with considerable surprise that we at last learn that Clara is not a free spirit at all, but a woman whose individual striving is foredoomed to failure, because she is a woman and a woman in love, who "must work through a man's imagination before she could become a person fit to dwell on earth with her fellows."

III.

Clara is pictured as having gone through some sort of crisis when she read Kropotkin's memoirs (second volume) which she bought at the anarchist bookshop. After reading the account of Kropotkin's escape from prison, she knew that she herself had also escaped, and that it would never be for her "an awful, a terrible and overwhelming thing to be a woman." On the contrary, "her childish detestation of her womanhood was gone," and she "accepted it and gloried in it as her instrument." She was Ariel, "who danced among men and played freakish tricks upon them, and lured them on to believe that all kinds of marvels would come to pass and bring them back to their senses to discover that she was after all only a woman, and that the marvels they looked for from her were really in themselves."

But Clara is just the woman the playwriting genius is looking for, since in his plays Adnor Rodd is trying to create "the woman of the future," who "can detach herself from her emotional experience and accept failure, as a man does." When Rodd meets Clara in the anarchist bookshop he can hardly believe his good fortune, since, as he says, "I never thought I should meet any one as strong as myself." The account of their first meeting and love at sight is more romantic than is usually found in our contemporary workaday fiction.

"He could not hear what she was saying, but her voice went thrilling to his heart. He gasped and reeled and dropped Charles Mann's book with a crash.

"Clara, who had not seen him, turned, and she too was overcome. He moved toward her and stood devouring her with his eyes and hers sought his.

"'This is Rodd,' said the bookseller. 'Adnor Rodd—a great friend of mine.'

"'Rodd,' repeated Clara.

"'He is very much interested in the theatre,' said the bookseller.

"'I was just looking at Charles Mann's new book . . . Will you let me give it you?'

"He moved away to pick up the book and came back clutching it, took out his fountain pen and wrote in a small, precise hand—

"'To my friend, from Adnor Rodd.'

"'My name is Clara Day,' she said.

"'You can't have any name yet . . . You are just you.'

"She understood him. He meant that externals were of no account in the delighted shock of their meeting."

Externals were of no account, nor apparently Charles Mann either. Mr. Cannan seems to be as muddled about women as about the war. However, what the playwright particularly likes in Clara is the way she says "the old," instead, as most people, "the yold." Having a nice ear for English, it would be interesting to know how Rodd likes "give it you," and "everybody was gay and lively but they two;" and "again there was nothing but they two;" or "no one mattered but she." which are unlovely to say the least, even if some mental reservations on the part of the reader could make them endurable.

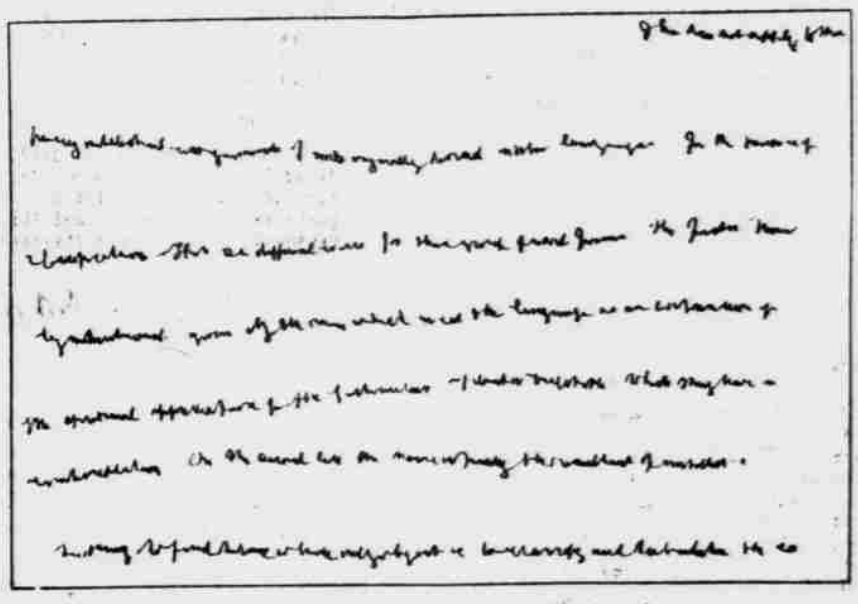
IV.

The information is given that *Mummery* is Gilbert Cannan's nineteenth novel. And yet novel readers could probably enumerate the Fourteen Points sooner than Mr. Cannan's nineteen novels. The truth is Gilbert Cannan is one of those fortunate, or it may be unfortunate, individuals whose personality seems to count for more than his books. Everybody knows that he married Barrie's daughter and is a conscientious objector and is a good looking young man who writes fiction that perhaps looks, so to say, better than it actually is. Cannan will always be named among the more serious of the younger English novelists, yet his stories are seldom as interesting as they promise to be, and look as if they ought to be, and make no deep impression. The lack must be more in his ideas and his imagination than in his actual story telling, which always has interesting features and is not commonplace. The description of the Imperium Theatre in the present story, with its actor manager who has a "Sir" to his name, is excellent. But the geniuses are largely conventions, and the heroine is a thesis—the latter, however, clothed with some charm.

Still another novel by Mr. Cannan is announced for the early fall, the twentieth by the present count, called *Pink Roses*, and embodying the author's well advertised views on the war. As an advance antidote to *Pink Roses* may be recommended Anne Douglas Sedgwick's story in the August Atlantic, called *Autumn Crocuses*, which seems directly addressed to our young war satirists, particularly the poets. In Mrs. de Selincourt's story, the soldier poet who had fondly believed his war poems to be searing, scorching, terrible and even wicked, if one would, is shocked into speechlessness when his lady critic, who has been through some war on her own account, gently calls them "sad."

MUMMERY. By Gilbert Cannan. George H. Doran Company.

"The Hill of Vision"



A sample of automatic writing from "The Hill of Vision," by Frederick Bligh Bond.

"AUTOMATIC" was once a word that boasted a flavor of classical erudition, but since the spread of automatic fountain pens, elevators, telephones and lunch rooms, it has deteriorated into a most matter of fact prosy expression. Hence *The Hill of Vision*, a collection of automatic writings by Frederick Bligh Bond, F. R. I. B. A. (you guess), including automatic propheey, philosophy and metaphysics seem in no way uncouth.

Mr. Bond has already given us *The Gate of Remembrance*, another collection of automatic writings which were concerned with his experiences in this sort of revelation while he was engaged in archæological work at the ancient abbey in Glastonbury, England. *The Hill of Vision*, however, deals with a more important subject, containing propheeies of the beginning and ending of the war with Germany and much other material on the social, moral and political regeneration of the world which is to follow and in which we are, presumably, now somewhat painfully involved.

There is no attempt on the part of Mr. Bond or of Ralph Adams Cram, who contributes a preface and postscript, to fasten the responsibility for the writings on any particular sphere, plane or other realm of incorporeal beings, though Cæsar Augustus, Imperator et Pacificator, implicates himself by signing some of the propheeies. As a matter of purely historical interest we mention that Augustus proves himself a bad tempered ghost. But whoever, or whatever, the shadowy guide of the subliminal pen may have been, Mr. Bond's book presents the attested fact that on March 13, 1918, eight days before the beginning of the Kaiser's battle, the automatic author declared that the war would end by autumn of that year. Further propheeies extending through July, 1918, were justified by events.

These foretellings furnish excellent food for believers in mystic seances, and stumbling blocks for those who sneer. As for the other matter of the scripts, they are tough morsels for the average intellect. Chosen races, Spirit dominant over Matter, national consciousness, Vibrations and Messianic comings, take us into deep waters. And if we believe that the proved propheeies establish the infallibility of the automatic writing, we must also believe in the League of Nations, Theosophy, and the assertion that Mitteleuropa is shortly to become a heaven on earth. Before we accept these we demand that Mr. Bond accept some contributions from later writers and publish a new book.

THE HILL OF VISION. By Frederick Bligh Bond. Boston: Marshall Jones Company.

NOW the truth is, we read wrong (or wrongly, as may be). Sinclair Lewis's new novel, to be published by Harcourt, Brace & Howe, will be called *Free Air*, just as was the serial. The novel is half as long again as the serial. When we spoke of the novel as *The Job* we mixed it up with Lewis's story of a stenographer published several years ago. At the time Lewis wrote *The Job* he had only a typewriter. Since then he has acquired a flivver and *Free Air* is the natural consequence.